carried in an engineering operations channel over the line, and wherein the line termination equipment and the subscriber terminal incorporate means for providing said engineering operations channel in the form of a sequence of asynchronous minicells over the line, wherein said engineering operations channel is framed and byte oriented and is scrambled over the line and wherein packet voice traffic is carried in spare capacity in said engineering operations channel, and wherein the line termination equipment and the subscriber terminal further comprise synchronisation means wherein the synchronisation occurs during a period of transmission of null data on said engineering operations channel.

2.   (amended) A digital communications system, comprising a subscriber network termination, a line termination equipment, and a transmission path therebetween, the subscriber termination and the line termination being coupled to the path via respective first and second modems, wherein the subscriber termination and the line termination each incorporate respectively a first and second management system each system consisting of a corresponding plurality of management levels, said first and second management systems being arranged to control and supervise a digital communication service via messaging carried in an engineering operations channel over the path, wherein said subscriber termination and the line termination each incorporate respective multiplexer means interfacing with the management levels of that termination, and wherein said subscriber termination and line termination incorporate respective packet transaction means each interfacing with the respective multiplexer means for carrying messaging between corresponding subscriber termination and line termination management levels in an engineering operations channel over the path, said engineering operations channel being comprised by a sequence of asynchronous minicells over the path wherein said engineering operations channel is framed and byte oriented and wherein packet voice traffic is carried in spare capacity in said engineering operations channel, and wherein the line termination equipment and the subscriber terminal each further comprise

scrambling and descrambling means; and

synchronisation means wherein the synchronisation occurs during a period of transmission of null data on said engineering operations channel.

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4.   (amended) A digital communication system as claimed in claim 2, wherein said line termination equipment is coupled to an ATM backplane whereby the digital service is delivered.

6.   (amended) A digital subscriber network termination for receiving a digital service over a subscriber line coupled thereto, the subscriber termination including a management system consisting of a plurality of management levels, a first and a second management system being arranged to control and supervise said digital communication service via messaging carried in an engineering operations channel over the line, multiplexer means interfacing with the management levels of the subscriber termination, and packet transaction means interfacing with the multiplexer means for carrying messaging to and from the management levels in an engineering operations channel over the line, said engineering operations channel being comprised by a sequence of asynchronous minicells over the line wherein said engineering operations channel is framed and byte oriented and wherein packet voice traffic is carried in spare capacity in said engineering operations channel, and wherein the line termination equipment and the subscriber terminal each further comprise

scrambling and descrambling means; and

synchronisation means wherein the synchronisation occurs during a period of transmission of null data on said engineering operations channel.

7.   (amended) A method of providing a digital communication service over a line from a line termination equipment disposed at a central station to a subscriber terminal, the method comprising

providing a engineering operations channel for effecting control and management of the subscriber terminal;

transporting said engineering operations channel in a sequence of asynchronous minicells over the line, wherein said engineering operations channel is framed and byte oriented and is scrambled over the line and wherein packet voice traffic is carried in spare capacity in said engineering operations channel, and

performing synchronisation between the central station and the subscriber terminal during a period of transmission of null data on said engineering operations channel.

12. (amended) A method of transporting digital traffic over a line from a central station to a subscriber terminal, the method comprising

providing an engineering operations channel over the line, wherein said engineering operations channel is transported over said line in asynchronous minicells and said engineering operations channel is framed and byte oriented and is scrambled over the line and wherein packet voice traffic is carried in spare capacity in said engineering operations channel; and

performing synchronisation between the central station and the subscriber terminal during a period of transmission of null data on said engineering operations channel.

13. (amended) A method of controlling digital communications system comprising a subscriber network termination, a line termination equipment, and a transmission path therebetween, the subscriber termination and the line termination each incorporating respectively a first and second management system each system consisting of a corresponding plurality of management levels, said first and second management systems being arranged to control and supervise said digital communication service, the method comprising

providing messaging paths between corresponding management levels; [and]

multiplexing said messaging paths into an engineering operations channel over the line, wherein said engineering operations channel is transported in a sequence of asynchronous minicells over the line and said engineering operations channel is framed and byte oriented and is scrambled over the line and wherein packet voice traffic is carried in spare capacity in said engineering operations channel; and

performing synchronisation between the central station and the subscriber terminal during a period of transmission of null data on said engineering operations channel.

Cancel claims 3, 8 –11 without prejudice.

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